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Member for Blue Mountains

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RAIL COMMUTER ACCESS

A lack of easy access to train stations is a problem which locals in my electorate of Blue Mountains are all too familiar with.

Currently, there are no easy-access train stations between Katoomba and Springwood.

Often, people from the city refer to communities in my electorate collectively as "The Blue Mountains" and do so without realising the significance of the distances involved.

To give the Parliament some perspective of the vast distance between the two easy-access stations at Katoomba and Springwood, we are talking about a distance by road of 31 kilometres. That is the distance from Parliament House on Macquarie Street to Cronulla in the south, Girraween to the west, or Narrabeen to the north. It is a distance which takes in over 10,000 homes—resided in by people who need to make use of public transport every day to get around the mountains or down to the city for work.

I am aware that the Government has plans to provide easy access to the Leura and Wentworth Falls stations and I welcome that on behalf of my community.

What the Blue Mountains community needs now is a concrete, transparent process from the Minister for Transport and his department through which the community can contribute to an open process of public consultation on easy-access upgrades for our other Blue Mountains stations.

I recently received a petition at my office from a local group of public transport activists, the Woodford Railway Access Action Group. It has been campaigning for some time to bring the plight of Mid Mountains residents to the attention of the Minister for Transport.

I commend the efforts of Erzi Grimes, Melinda Kelsey, Ron Bromley, Ian McMillan and my comrade Councillor Annette Bennett.

I return to the distance I mentioned earlier, that between Springwood and Katoomba. It is 31 kilometres between accessible stations. Woodford is more or less equidistant between Katoomba and Springwood. Just as commuters at a range of stations across this State experience hardship accessing their stations, residents in the Mid Mountains—such as those living in Linden, Woodford, Hazelbrook, Lawson, Bullaburra and Wentworth Falls—also experience hardship if they are elderly, mobility impaired or have children in prams.

In my view this is unacceptable.

I will tomorrow be tabling the petition from the Woodford Railway Access Action Group and endorsing their call for easy-access upgrades to stations in the Mid Mountains.

No residents should be excluded from utilising their local public transport network, so it is my expectation that eventually all train stations throughout New South Wales will be upgraded.

In the meantime I prevail upon the Government to bear in mind the unique geography of my electorate when planning station upgrades in the coming months.

As a series of small towns and villages along a ridge line, we are spread out; and our streets are often steep and winding. Bus services are sporadic, especially on weekends. For this reason, it is not good enough to tell locals to make their own way to the next nearest station with an accessible platform.

I also highlight for the benefit of the Parliament the senselessness of the recently completed footbridge at Bullaburra station, which locals often describe to me as a "bridge to nowhere".

The Bullaburra bridge to nowhere provides easy access of a sort—via long pedestrian ramps—from the southern side of the Great Western Highway. But anyone with mobility difficulties or a disability will find themselves at the top of the bridge looking at stairs down to the train station and stairs down to the northern side of Bullaburra on Railway Parade.

The design and construction of this bridge was rushed by the Baird Government before checking that it was fit for purpose. The Government would have very quickly and easily discovered that the local residents needed a real access solution to Bullaburra station if it had made an effort to speak to locals in the first place. But it did not.

As Mrs Una King and her friends from the Bullaburra Progress Association will attest, we have a soaring bridge at Bullaburra which takes very few people not very far at all.

We need a thorough plan from this Government to upgrade our stations so that every local resident can make use of public transport.